

hosted by President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama.

In 1998, The Rance Allen Group was inducted into the International Gospel Music Hall of Fame and Museum. In 2005, Rance Allen was awarded BMI's Trailblazer of Gospel Music Award. In 2009 the Black Academy of Arts and Letters named him as one of the Great Men of Gospel.

Bishop Allen wove his ministry and his music into a tapestry which shone for the glory of God. His was a life well lived, and when he completed his time on earth at age 71, his Lord called him home with the words in Matthew 25:21, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

To Bishop Allen's wife Ellen, his brothers Thomas and Steve, his congregants and countless friends, we hope the memory of this great man brings comfort as his joyous life is celebrated.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

#### HON. MARTHA ROBY

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 18, 2020*

Mrs. ROBY. Madam Speaker, I was unable to vote on Thursday, December 17, 2020. Had I been present, I would have voted as follows: YEA on Roll Call No. 245.

#### KAZAKHSTAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

#### HON. STEVE CHABOT

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 18, 2020*

Mr. CHABOT. Madam Speaker, as a co-chair of the U.S. Kazakhstan Caucus, I rise today to acknowledge Republic of Kazakhstan's Independence Day, which they celebrated on December 16. It's hard to believe that next year will mark the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence. While Kazakhstan still has considerable work to do, especially with respect to human rights and the rule of law, I applaud Kazakhstan for its commitment to democracy and for continuing to take the necessary steps toward a more democratic and free society for all.

Democracy requires constant work and vigilance, and in Kazakhstan, President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who assumed office in 2019, has continued to focus on internal reforms which initially began under former President Nazarbayev. These reforms have focused on a variety of different areas including increasing the openness of government and the government's responsiveness to the concerns of ordinary Kazakh citizens. In that vein, Kazakhstan will hold parliamentary elections on January 10, after recently made parliamentary reforms, such as ensuring certain minority party rights within parliament.

As Kazakhstan prepares to turn thirty years old, it is important to reaffirm the United States' commitment to Kazakhstan and to the bilateral relationship between the United States and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan remains an important ally and partner in Central Asia

and U.S. companies continue to be the largest source of direct foreign investment there. Kazakhstan, a strong partner in Afghanistan, entered into an Enhanced Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century with the United States in 2018, where the U.S. and Kazakhstan agreed to heightened cooperation on political and security issues, Afghanistan and other defense initiatives, terrorism, extremism, rule of law, and human rights.

Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a global public health and economic crisis this year, Kazakhstan has been a leader and valuable partner with the United States. President Tokayev, has shown leadership in global health while working directly with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, which maintains a Central Asian office in Kazakhstan.

Madam Speaker, I applaud Kazakhstan's leadership, its progress, and its commitments to further political reforms that will secure its leadership role in the international community. I am watching with interest as Kazakhstan continues to strive to meet its international commitments to freedom, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. I look forward to continuing to support Kazakhstan in its embrace of democratic standards. I wish the people of Kazakhstan a happy Independence Day and look forward to celebrating the Republic's 30th anniversary next year.

#### DEPENDABLE EMPLOYMENT AND LIVING IMPROVEMENTS FOR VETERANS ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT

SPEECH OF

#### HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, December 16, 2020*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as a senior member of the Judiciary Committee and the Homeland Security Committee, and daughter-in-law of a beloved member of the Tuskegee Airmen who served our nation so heroically in World War II, I rise in strong support of the Senate Amendment to H.R. 7105, the "Johnny D. Isakson and David P. Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020," which keeps faith with what President Lincoln called our solemn obligation "to provide for them who have borne the battle, and their widow and their orphan."

I support this bipartisan omnibus legislation because it provides support for women veterans, expands benefits for homeless veterans, and ensures servicemembers and veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be cared for properly and compassionately.

Let me highlight some of the important elements of this most important legislation.

Title V of the bill incorporates H.R. 7105, the Deborah Sampson Act, which the House passed on November 12, 2019, to address inequities and barriers that women veterans face when accessing VA care and benefits.

Deborah Sampson Gannett was a Revolutionary War veteran who served in the Continental Army from 1781 to 1783 and was awarded a full military pension for her military service after years of petitioning Congress.

Specifically the legislation creates a dedicated Office of Women's Health at VA, ex-

pands reintegration and readjustment group counseling retreats for women veterans and their family members, and bolsters call center services for women veterans.

The bill eliminates barriers to care by staffing every VA health facility with a dedicated women's health primary care provider, training clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans.

In addition, the legislation bolsters supportive services by providing access to legal services for women veterans, expanding child care for veterans receiving VA health care, and requiring the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report on VA's efforts to support homeless or at-risk women veterans.

And importantly, the bill improves access to care and benefits for survivors of military sexual trauma (MST) by expanding MST counseling to former Guard and Reserve members, allowing VA to treat the physical health conditions of MST, and improving the claims process for MST survivors at the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Also included in the omnibus package before are several important provisions that I strongly support, including provisions directing VA to continue providing the disability benefits questionnaires online, streamlining veterans' access to earned disability benefits.

The bill lowers the age at which a surviving spouse may still receive dependency indemnity compensation benefits at the point of remarriage and increases VA's funding cap from \$5 million to \$10 million annually to better assist states, territories and tribal governments in covering the increasing costs of operating and maintaining state-run veteran cemeteries.

I am very pleased that this eliminates co-payments for Native American veterans accessing health care at VA and establishes an Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs to advise the VA Secretary on matters relating to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native American veterans.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation requires VA to review the entire scheduling process—for both in-house and non-VA care—in order to increase veterans' access to timely health care and to remove barriers to VA funding for organizations in need of critical upgrades to keep homeless veterans safe from the coronavirus.

Another important provision of the bill is the expansion of the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses for Training Providers (VET TEC) program to help veterans and servicemembers transition to civilian life.

In this time where the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of so many Americans, this legislation ensures that servicemembers who contract COVID-19 while serving will be eligible for VA benefits and requires VA to take a more central and active role by developing a plan to address the financial exploitation of veterans.

The legislation requires VA to establish a national protocol for administering medical exams for volunteer drivers providing transportation for veterans who are unable to safely get to and from their appointments.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this legislation assists homeless veterans by improving VA's ability to award grant and per diem program funding to qualified providers of homelessness assistance services, expand HUD-VASH vouchers to veterans with other than honorable discharges, provide legal services for homeless